



## A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY: TEACHER AND SOCIAL EDUCATOR'S FORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to outline the importance of the study of biographical elements in teacher and social educator's formation. It builds on fragments of history and actions of two educators who have translated their personal convictions in acts of human and social promotion of their living space. Their biographies show us that the role of education is to form and prepare people who respect each other, with trust and sharing. Consistent with their principles and choices, they show us the way to discover what, how, for what and why to do in a given context, amid the challenges of a society governed by the dynamics of consumption, the devaluation of life and a certain clouding consciences.

**KEYWORDS:** biographical studies, teacher formation, social educator formation.

### Introduction

The study of biographies is interesting to explain certain phenomena. It puts people in their social place and brings up historical elements not always immediately apparent. The biography echoes the voices of the past, helps to understand the present and embrace the future, their possibilities, openings, gaps and ways to go, shows us what people do, how and why they do. Bourdieu (2005:132), for example, at a time of his autobiography, says he wrote especially for the younger ones, in order to put himself "in thinking, in the place where, writer, painter, laborer and office worker, each one occupied in the social world [...]".

The biographies we refer describe social educators who seek to build a more ethical social fabric, based on popular education, in their personal beliefs and their relationship with reality. They understand learning as an integral process with cognitive, physical, psychological, moral, religious and economic aspects. The principle of any learning process and human transformation is the search for truth that liberates. They had a common characteristic, commitment to the people, social development and education.

The subject exists in relation to the other, from the birth, and, according reveals himself, becomes protagonist, self and interconstructor. Each one can take ownership of portions humanity's knowledge, inside a transformative movement of life, which affects educators and students, guided by the search for the best way forward. This question renews the steps of the educator.

### Why to echo de voices of José and Lázara?

Among the biographies of leaders, social educators and teachers, we highlight José Joaquim and Lázara Silveira Pacheco, just because they perceived learning as a process of attitudinal changes, in which social education adds, integrates, qualifies and makes the unity of human condition. Just because they were successful in their educational and social practices, experienced the delight of the sense of life, knew how to be, learn, live, love, hope, believe and embrace. In their practices appears the need to introduce criteria so that people are able to decide, to examine what to do, how and why to do. It is being in the world. Consciousness is the way we walk through life in this world. Every step of their stories is about the encounter with the liberating truth (cf. John 8:34) or the best way to emulate the practice of Jesus and give reasons for their hope (cf. 1 Peter 3:15). The chosen examples can show the power of biographical analysis, help to understand the biographies of social educators and to weave an educational paradigm to meet today's requirements. A mixture of religious, ecological, subjective, cultural and rational aspects is the dynamics of learning that gives courage, selflessness, hope, awareness and strength to establish a life project.

Still a child, José Joaquim came to Brazil in the early twentieth century. After working in agriculture and a railroad, he became a teacher and catechist. He developed an exemplary community work, to build a social fabric based on ethics and knowledge.

Lázara Silveira Pacheco, born in Mairinque, SP, left the monastic life in 1967 to attend family problems. He practiced the profession of nurse and simultaneously worked in basic ecclesial communities, catechesis and social assistance of families in poverty. He founded and directed for many years a shelter dedicated to children and adolescents in situations of abandonment.

From their biographies, we extracted some themes that we believe are important for the formation of the social educator.<sup>1</sup>

### Know to be and do, and vice versa

In a dialectical view, these two perspectives are constructed, confronted and open into a new synthesis, boosting the social educator development. By this point, we can highlight the fascination for discovery of knowledge, as described José:

"I sensed that the mother of poverty is ignorance. I first went to fight it in myself, and then help others overcome it, as I tried to do later for catechesis and education [...] 1918, at ten years old, I started to attend classes the primary school, the school that was located in a high place, a neighborhood called Pimenta. My teacher was D. Zulmira Silveira de Almeida Matos. I was one of the best students in the class and had a huge charm and great affection for books. I made my first exam on December 13, 1918, and stopped attending classes in 1920, at twelve years of age. At that time, I acquired a delight for reading, which accompanied me for life. Many years later, I had the habit of walking with an open book in hand, reading whenever possible. The texts that most pleased me were the natural history and religion." (Souza Neto and Schramm, 2003:31.)

In Lázara experience, since childhood, curiosity and indignation were means to acquire knowledge. After a serious

[...] pneumonia, Lázara entered the time of mischief. In Externato St. Scholastica, public school she attended, she was too naughty, turbulent, quarreled. She used to write on the back of the girls and teased the teachers. The mother did not know what action to take. The last joke sparked three days of suspension. He drew the face of the teacher D. Zizi on the board, with one eye open and one eye closed. It was too much for the discipline of the time. Threatened of being locked alone in the death's-head room, Lázara still scoffed punishment: "I want to see how the skull works!" She said she was going to break everything. The director, Prof. Daniel, called the mother. Lázara would have to leave the public school and go to a private school. D. Ignatia, agonized, entered the Santa Clara church and gave his daughter to Our Lady: "Our Lady takes care of she, I do not know what to do!" Whether because of the mother's prayer or because other reasons, the fact is that Lázara improved. Became another girl! However, studying in private school. (ICA Archive.)

Knowing how to be and do leads to appreciate the joys of discovery of each day, even when the situations are tense and painful. As one of our characters describes:

"On my learning, a fact stuck in my memory. Years later, I left the hoe and the coffee plantation, and went to work as a pharmacy assistant. In a conversation, I used the word "escorreito", which means flawless, accurate, correct, and honest. Everyone laughed at me. The pharmacist was seeking Portuguese dictionary, located the word, as I had employed it. Praised, I went home excited, happy, and eager to increase my knowledge. This is one reason for what I think about the importance of valuing small discoveries during the learning process. In adolescence, each discovery drove me to know more and more." (Testimony of José, in ICA Archive.)<sup>2</sup>

Learning requires a decision, which reverberates throughout life, as now proposes Unesco. Let us see how Joséh explains this concept in his biography:

Faced with the precariousness of the situation, I decided to dedicate always myself to instructive reading of books in science, history and religion, when I could get them. It is worth remarking that at that time was not so easy to find a book. Gradually, I learned to think, read, write and analyze the world away from the public school, but close to my everyday life. A geography book was my charm. In every spare moment, I read and reread that book that held my attention and made me understand better the nature. When it got dark, I read under the lamplight, and was thinking about what I had read into the night. (Testimony of José, in ICAArchive.)

Dreaming is a condition for the construction of knowledge and learning in all spheres and fields in which materializes human life, even in spaces marked by denial of frights.

Sixteen years old, Lázara began planning the best way to realize her dream of being a missionary in Africa: "This led me to dedicate myself to study, to know the faith. My family was not rich, but had the conditions to keep me in school. The city of Sorocaba was developing rapidly. I had school, work and nuns institutions." (ICAArchive.)

In different ways, José and Lázara desired to discover, to know, to change his life. The dream is a lever to know. Patent in the expressions of Lázara, this form of motivation also stands out in José's view:

"What I perhaps wanted was to know the very God and the human being. Since God is infinite, the knowledge of everything that is connected to it is also infinite [...] Are distinct things, but closely related, to the point that some have claimed that the Protestant countries enriched more than Catholics, because they dedicated themselves more to education and reading the Bible. Thus, Protestants developed the ability to reflect and discuss, while Catholics were more attached to superstition, lack of religious formation and instruction." (Souza Neto and Schramm, 2003:31-32.)

In the assumptions of José and Lázara, there is a notion of subject that we could set based on the sense that people attributes to his existence. This process presents the motivations and dynamics of learning. In our view, this sense is in the interstices of the relationship between the subject and the everyday. From this perspective, we see their biographies as an almost uninterrupted process of relationship between daily life and dreams.

Sometimes, everyday life encourages, sometimes the dream attracts the everyday life. Their desire to study made them discover the strategies and tactics possible for this. Even if they had to repeat the same gesture in a way that was always new. This is look beyond what you see; it is to acquire the ability to contemplate the invisible. The vision of a knowledge imbricated with life appears in these biographies, as a way to ensure the aesthetics of life, to make it lighter, beautiful and pleasant. The meeting of truth, the truth of life that is in God. The soul is restless until finds the true God in the every day walk, according Augustinian language.

Lázara says that when out of the monastery, used to look at the simple, the suffering and the lost in the streets. Despite feeling happy with the consecration, she imagined that educate and live the Gospel in the world was a more effective way to help cure many pains, recovering people immersed in great pain. Lázara joined the movement of ecclesial base communities, working in small groups, to strengthen the faith. In Sorocaba, her sister Luiza had a music school. To Lázara, it was a marvel. "I sang, participated in choirs, was conductor of the choir, and enjoyed that life. I left the cloister, entered the wheel of the world and did very well!" (ICAArchive.)

In the dynamic of her history, faith is something that drives and mobilizes to restore justice. Knowing does not mean only read or interpret the world. It is mostly read, interpret and transform personal life and those around her. The creative subject, imbued with hope, knows that there is not "[...] a reality in itself, in and by itself, but only in historical relationship with the men who change the world" (Gramsci 1984:34).

#### **For José, the exercise of a profession was the delight of teaching:**

"In 1937, I knew I could install a school. Therefore, I planned my new career. For that, I had the help of some brothers of the Third Order of St. Francis. Obtained the license to teach, on 21 September 1944, I founded the St. Joseph Educational Institute, in which I was a teacher and director for 27 years." Faith, in its simplicity, seeks opportunities that reality offers (Souza Neto and Schramm, 2003:74).

Several elements are present in the formation process. We could demarcate these life trajectories as a walk between dream and reality. In the weaving of life, it is necessary to develop some dimensions, articulate the reasons of why, how and who educate. At first, evident in José and Lázara is the strength born from the faith. For Lázara and José, the meaning of existence has faith as a starting point: "During twenty years of work on the boiler, unable to continue the studies, I tried to dive deeper and deeper in Bible knowledge and experience them. I always con-

sidered first the mission to which God had called me, before career." (Testimony of José, in ICAArchive.)

Lázara assumed Christian action in the world, as someone who strives to please the Lord (2Cor 5:9), in service to the community, with joy, joviality, simplicity and confidence. She understood the professional work as an excellent way to live her faith as someone who contributes to building a better city for everyone, immersed in fact, at work each day. Likewise, José was aware that he was doing everything to please God and receive everyone as a brother. As a Franciscan Third, he used to repeat: "My God and my all!"

"Around 1975, I discovered a different way of life. In São Paulo, I went to the nursing assistant course, specifying in psychiatry, and I started working at the Hospital São Paulo. Care for the sick was a joy; it was a way to live the love of Christ." With that, she was very happy. Working life was a very suitable place to live the faith and witness.

Know and transform life compose the educational action. The philosophical thought of nineteenth century problematized the insufficiency of knowledge without a transformation of the world. From the perspective of José Joaquim, knowledge must illuminate life, guide into the truth, lead to something operational. He founded various groups and communities, imbued with the idea that knowledge has to interfere in life.

"The process of acquisition of knowledge is always conflicting, because it changes many things we believe in and we think are true. As we study, we go revealing a world that we only knew by appearance. If learning is difficult under the guidance of a teacher, much more difficult is self-taught. I struggled to have religious formation and at the same time, get a profession that would allow me to fight ignorance, not only religious, but also social. According to my view, the school was a tool that helped expand my mission [...] The school was walking. Despite certain difficulties, always had her students and I did not miss the opportunity to give catechesis and teaching of good quality. The proof is that the students who provided examinations in the state were approved, which was one of the era standards." (Souza Neto and Schramm, 2003:75).

Professional work helps the subject to reinforce their identity. In general, being unemployed is to be lost, is getting a little adrift in social relations. The work is more than just a means of survival, is a form of personal achievement and serve the community, from the perspective of solidarity.

By the filter of to know and live to transform the world, Lázara understood that should give a concrete response to the harsh social reality of abandoned children, in the community and city. Woman simple, cheerful, hopeful and strong faith, easy and direct communication, began to reunite children and families in the neighborhood: "To be happy is to give with joy," she used to say. Families began to notice a big change in children and sought Lázara to thank. Mothers noted that decreased complaints from neighbors and the police on their doors, children began to go to school. They said, "the fat woman who lived down near the river, taught them."

"I believe that taking care of abandoned children and evangelize them is a mission that divine providence trust me. I believe in the power of divine providence. I want to voluntarily cooperate with divine providence and serve abandoned children, seeing in them the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to share everything I have, without prejudicing the rights of anyone. I shall have the sole purpose of the happiness of minors, their human and religious formation. We are children of God and we are all brothers. Leave a person suffering without doing anything to reduce their suffering means that we don't live the Our Father yet."

She mobilized the community, created a communion movement around the needs of the place. Adopted a child from the slum and brought her to his house with a few children. In the late seventies, Diadema commissioners asked her to receive another children: "They stay in the cells of the prisoners, to not remain thrown on the street, because there is nowhere to leave them." Lázara expanded the space and organized the Children's Home St. Joseph.

"As far as possible, I struggled to learn and expand my knowledge of all possible materials. In 1940 and 1941, I attended religious culture and dogmatic theology 'Mater Boni Consilii', under the direction of Jesuit priests in the St. Louis College, in São Paulo. In addition, I read a lot and studied alone, until I got realize my dream of graduating teacher. I studied very hard and received encouragement and support from friends of Campinas, all teachers. I passed the exam of teaching by the Ministry of Education and Culture." (Testimony of José. ICAArchive.)

The choice belongs to the individual, but needs the support of friends, family and the existence of objective conditions. This tripod, when integrated, can help the individual to change his life, especially when this man has willpower, hope and optimism operating.

In large notebook with a black cover, Lázara wrote the names of new friends, "Tercina, the next door neighbor; Regina, the neighbor of funds; Diva and Bernardo, the grandmother Aurea, her husband Salvador and grandchildren; Tereza Cunha and children; Floripes and theirs; Lourdes and her family. Odete

Caffaro, nursing co-worker at the Hospital São Paulo; Maria da Conceição and her husband Expedito Batista were friends of the same street. Lázara sought to relate the best he could with all the neighbors and other people and began to gather the families in the neighborhood. The main attraction of these gatherings were the parties. "How was such a poor neighborhood...," says the sister of Lázara, "we had parties with their own children here the street. At the time of June Festival, one brought a bag of popcorn, another peanut, or cake, or three eggs, or a kilo of wheat flour... Moreover, on Easter, party too. Only we had not Easter egg. We did very small drawings in cardboard and placed in tiny little eggs, jellybeans, and gave them. Parents, each came with a little one, with candies, the other with some cookies."

José Joaquim gave priority to the relational field as a space of development of almost all human potentialities, especially the ability to get along and live together. In today's society, this ability is increasingly weaker, because the driving force of social structures reinforces individualism.

"Over the years, built some friendships that helped me a lot and that, paradoxically, even managed to mess up a little my walk To become a teacher was only possible because I counted on the friendship of a group of teachers." (Souza Neto and Schramm, 2003:78)

In these narratives, we glimpse a heterogeneous every day, rich in possibilities, reflecting a cultural melting pot of religious background. Authors, like Bourdieu, believe that the subject plays habits and representations as if they were unquestionable truths, but in daily life, he finds tactics and exit strategies and achievement. Daily life is a space that allows the drive of life. Somewhat by the Gramscian perspective, when someone changes, changes his environment, and this, once transformed, transforms the individual.

### Conclusions

This text took for granted that the biographical study expands the scope of the understanding that education occurs through multiple events in different spaces throughout life. The educator is a reference to the community. The balance from a life project full of senses contributes to a humanizing process. The teacher can extend the possibilities and opportunities of self-awareness, knowledge and discoveries that affect the transformation and construction of cultural values and habits, like the organic intellectual figure.

Praxis educator, based on the awareness that the history and the individual complement interactively allows to overcome the irrationality of subservience culture and exploitation that pervade the daily lives of excluded, especially if supported by the conviction that the truth has, in fact, liberating force. Knowledge is important when results from individual and collective experience, to serve a better life for all.

The engagement in discovery of self and other, within the range of human and nature relations, demands creativity, to face and overcome challenges, to give meaning to life. This meaning is constructed and caught in the relations of everyday life. It establishes a logic that helps people achieve their dreams and projects; propose changes for themselves and the everyday. A vital point in José Joaquim and Lázara experience is the meaning they attach to events, as a link between reason and transcendence, in which the event transcends appearance. In a unity between theory and practice, training and action falls within the small and large reflections that arise in everyday life.

The more the educator is aware that the truth liberates, the more they become, and not only him, but his surroundings, their community and society as a whole. So that the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, with its operating procedures, tend to disappear or be placed in another level. Where comes coated of ethical values, truth organizes and reorganizes relations in view of the realization of freedom. We propose that follow the practice of Jesus can help realize this principle.

### Disclosures

The authors declare no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.

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